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United Nations

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Sixty-ninth session (1–5 October 2018)

General Assembly
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Note

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I. Introduction

A. Opening of the session

1. The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme held its sixty-ninth plenary session at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, from 1–5 October 2018. It was opened by the Chairperson, Her Excellency Ambassador Suraya Dalil (Afghanistan).

B. Representation

2. The following Executive Committee members were represented at the session:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, the Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Holy See, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

3. Other United Nations Member States present as observers were as follows:

Albania, Angola, Bahamas, Bhutan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Gabon, the Gambia, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Jamaica, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Monaco, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam.

4. United Nations non-Member States present as observers were as follows:

State of Palestine.

5. The European Union was represented as an observer.

6. Also present were the following intergovernmental organizations and other entities:

African Union, Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Council of Europe, Economic Community of West African States, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Organization of la Francophonie, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe,

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Sovereign Order of Malta.

7. The United Nations system was represented as follows:

Food and Agriculture Organization; International Organization for Migration Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Environment Programme; United Nations Industrial Development Organization; United Nations Institute for Training and Research; United Nations Office at Geneva; United Nations Population Fund; World Bank Group; World Food Programme; World Health Organization.

8. Some 27 non-governmental organizations and other partners were in attendance.

C. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

9. The Executive Committee adopted by consensus the following agenda (A/AC.96/LXIX/1):

1. Opening of the session, adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Statement by the High Commissioner.
3. General debate.
4. Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee:
   (a) International protection;
   (b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight.
5. Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation.
6. Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2018–2019 (revised).
7. Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations.
8. Other statements.
9. Meetings of the Standing Committee in 2019.
10. Consideration of the provisional agenda of the seventieth session of the Executive Committee.
11. Election of officers.
12. Any other business.
13. Adoption of the report of the sixty-ninth session of the Executive Committee.
14. Closing of the session.

D. Election of officers for the seventieth session

10. Under rule 10 of its Rules of Procedure, the Committee elected the following officers by acclamation, to serve the Committee from the day immediately following their election to the end of the last day of the following annual plenary session:

Chairperson:	H.E. Ambassador Boudjemâa DELMI (Algeria)
Vice-Chairperson:	H.E. Ambassador Geert MUYLLE (Belgium)
Vice-Chairperson:	H.E. Ambassador Maria Nazareth FARANI AZEVÊDO (Brazil)
Rapporteur:	Ms. Farhat AYESHA (Pakistan)

II. Work of the sixty-ninth session

11. A summary of the general debate, delivered by the Chairperson, is contained in the annex.

12. The High Commissioner's statement delivered during the session and summary records of each meeting will be made available on UNHCR's website http://www.unhcr.org/excom.

III. Decisions of the Executive Committee

A. General decision on administrative, financial and programme matters

13. The Executive Committee,

(a) *Recalls* that the Executive Committee, at its sixty-eighth session, approved programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under the biennial programme budget 2018–2019, as set out in document A/AC.96/1169, amounting to $7,508,414,120 for 2018; *notes* that the additional needs under supplementary budgets in 2018 amount to $766,908,669 as at 30 June 2018; approves the total current requirements for 2018 amounting to $8,275,322,789; and *authorizes* the High Commissioner, within these total appropriations, to effect adjustments in regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters budgets;

(b) *Confirms* that the activities proposed in the biennial programme budget 2018 2019 (revised), as set out in document A/AC.96/1180, are consistent with the Statute of the Office of the High Commissioner (A/RES/428 (V)); the High Commissioner's other functions as recognized, promoted or requested by the General Assembly, the Security Council or the Secretary-General; and the relevant provisions of the financial rules for voluntary funds administered by the High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/503/Rev.10);

(c) *Approves* the revised programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters under the proposed 2018–2019 biennial programme budget (revised), as set out in document A/AC.96/1180, and amounting to $8,591,122,136 for 2019, including the United Nations regular budget contribution towards headquarters costs, the reserves and the Junior Professional Officer programme; and *authorizes* the High Commissioner, within this total appropriation, to effect adjustments in regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters budgets;

(d) *Takes note* of the financial statements for the year 2017 as contained in the Report of the Board of Auditors to the General Assembly on the financial report and audited financial statements of the voluntary funds administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the year ended 31 December 2017 (A/73/5/Add.6) and the Report by the High Commissioner on key issues and measures taken in response to the recommendations in the Report of the Board of Auditors (A/AC.96/1179/Add.1); and *requests* to be kept regularly informed on the measures taken to address the recommendations and the observations raised in these documents;

(e) *Requests* the High Commissioner, within the resources available, to respond flexibly and efficiently to the needs indicated under the biennial programme budget for the years 2018–2019, *encourages* his Office to be as efficient and effective as possible with the funds provided while not diminishing life-saving protection and assistance to persons of concern, and *authorizes* him, in the case of additional emergency needs that cannot be met fully from the operational reserve, to create supplementary budgets and issue special appeals under all pillars, with such adjustments being reported to the subsequent Standing Committee meeting for consideration;

(f) *Acknowledges* with appreciation the burden that continues to be shouldered by developing and least developed countries hosting refugees; and *urges* Member States to recognize this valuable contribution to the protection of refugees and to participate in efforts to promote durable solutions and more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing; and

(g) *Urges* Member States, in light of the extensive needs to be addressed by the Office of the High Commissioner, and in parallel with the long-standing and substantial support provided by refugee-hosting countries, to respond generously and in a spirit of solidarity to his appeal for resources to meet in full the 2018–2019 biennial programme budget (revised) and to ensure that the Office is resourced in a timely and predictable manner, while keeping earmarking to a minimum level.

B. Decision on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2019

14. The Executive Committee,

Having reviewed the issues before it at its sixty-ninth session, and bearing in mind the decisions adopted at that session,

(a) *Decides* to convene three formal meetings of the Standing Committee in 2019, to be held in March, June and September;

(b) *Reaffirms* its decision on the framework for the Standing Committee's programme of work (A/AC.96/1003 paragraph 25, sub-paragraph 2 (c)); *authorizes* the Standing Committee to add and delete items, if appropriate, to this framework for its meetings in 2019; and *requests* member States to meet in December 2018 to prepare a detailed work plan for formal adoption by the Standing Committee at its first meeting in 2019;

(c) *Calls* upon its members to continue efforts to ensure that debate at the Executive Committee and its Standing Committee is of a substantive and interactive nature, yielding practical guidance and clear advice to the High Commissioner, in keeping with the Committee's statutory functions;

(d) *Calls* upon the Office of the High Commissioner to be explicit and analytical in its reports and presentations to the Committee and to submit documentation in a timely manner; and

(e) *Further* requests the Standing Committee to report on its work to the seventieth session of the Executive Committee.

C. Decision on observer participation in the meetings of the Standing Committee in 2018–2019

15. The Executive Committee,

1. *Approves* applications by the following Government observer delegations for participation in meetings of the Standing Committee from October 2018 to October 2019:

Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Mali, Malta and Ukraine.

2. *Authorizes* the Standing Committee to decide upon any additional applications from Government observer delegations to participate in its meetings during the aforementioned period;

3. *Approves* the following list of intergovernmental and international organizations to be invited by the High Commissioner to participate as observers in relevant meetings of its Standing Committee from October 2018 to October 2019:

United Nations specialized agencies, departments, funds and programmes; African Union; Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Council of Europe; East African Community; Economic Community of Central African States; Economic Community of West African States; European Union; Executive Secretariat of the Commonwealth of Independent States; Intergovernmental Authority on Development; International Centre for Migration Policy Development; International Committee of the Red Cross; International Development Law Organization, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; League of Arab States; Organization of Eastern Caribbean States; International Organisation of La Francophonie; Organization of Islamic Cooperation; the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; Southern African Development Community; and Sovereign Order of Malta.

D. Decision on the provisional agenda of the seventieth session of the Executive Committee

16. The Executive Committee,

Recalling its decision on working methods adopted at its fifty-fifth plenary session (A/AC.96/1003 paragraph 25);

Decides to adopt as the provisional agenda for the seventieth session of the Executive Committee the standard model contained in sub-paragraph 1 (f) of the above mentioned decision.

E. Decision on the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings

17. The Executive Committee,

Recalling rule 38 of its Rules of Procedure (A/AC.96/187/Rev.8) and its decision on the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings of the Executive Committee adopted at its sixty seventh plenary session;

Approves the application by the European Union to participate as an observer in the Committee's private meetings on asylum and refugee matters within its competence during the seventieth session of the Executive Committee.

Annex

Chairperson's summary of the general debate

The Chairperson summarized the general debate of the sixty-ninth session of the Executive Committee as follows:

I would like to thank you for the thoughtful and substantive debate over the past few days. 135 delegations took the floor in the last couple of days to express support for the refugee cause and for the work of UNHCR. This is a good sign, and we need to keep this momentum going. Together, we have touched upon many important issues, and I will attempt to summarize some of the highlights.

Let me start with the High Commissioner's opening remarks, in which he noted with concern that poverty, exclusion and the growing impact of climate change has led to the escalation of conflicts and the intensification of crises. He expressed concern about the lack of political will to counter the loud voices of division that allow discrimination, racism and xenophobia to flourish.

But at the same time, he conveyed hope that the global compact on refugees will be a rallying point for solidarity and a victory for multilateralism. In this regard, the High Commissioner urged delegations to welcome and strongly endorse the global compact on refugees, underscoring the principle of international cooperation.

The High Commissioner recalled the five core strategic directions that guide UNHCR's work: protecting; responding in emergencies; promoting inclusion and self-reliance; empowering the people UNHCR serves; and pursuing solutions. Taking into consideration our discussions, I will now group the various comments and suggestions made under these directions.

Under the theme of Protection, you emphasized its "centrality" and stressed that the principles of cooperation and solidarity are at the core of the international protection regime. You noted that hosting refugees is a moral obligation, as well as a legal obligation, in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and relevant regional instruments. Keeping borders open to people forced to flee their homes lies at the heart of protection, and you paid tribute to countries which have generously done so — in particular to those countries with limited resources where the notion of hospitality is respected. The right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement were highlighted, and you welcomed the emphasis placed on this in the global compact on refugees.

Numerous delegations remarked on the increasingly mixed nature of population flows and the challenges this can present. You noted that response measures should be guided by respect for fundamental rights and underlined the need to ensure protection for the most vulnerable, in particular unaccompanied minors, women and children. In this context, you stressed the need to combat violence, exploitation and trafficking, and encouraged States to find alternatives to detention. You also emphasized the importance of addressing the situation of refugees with special needs, including victims of sexual and gender-based violence and people living with disabilities.

We heard commitments by many of you to end statelessness by 2024 and examples of legislative and operational advancements to support such efforts. In his opening remarks, the High Commissioner announced that there will be a high-level event on statelessness at the next plenary session of the Executive Committee, and I encourage you to continue making progress towards the campaign's goals and to start looking at the kind of concrete pledges that can be made to help UNHCR work towards the eradication of statelessness.

Internal displacement remained a major concern for many of you. With the number of IDPs now standing at over 40 million, you noted that the commitment to "leave no one behind" must include action to support them. In this 20th anniversary year of the "Guiding principles on internal displacement", we cannot lose out on the opportunity to address this challenge with greater enthusiasm.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Under the theme of Responding to emergencies, you took good note of UNHCR's efforts to address the vast humanitarian needs around the world and praised the efforts of the dedicated aid workers on the front lines. Many of you also reminded us of the need to continue to protect and assist people in protracted situations.

The dire situation of refugees and migrants in Libya and travelling along the Central Mediterranean route was a cause of great concern. You noted the efforts of UNHCR in addressing the situation, and Niger was applauded for supporting this through the establishment of an evacuation mechanism. Appreciation was also expressed for coordination with the International Organization for Migration on this issue. Many also pointed out that the principle of rescue at sea, regardless of race or nationality, must be upheld if we are to restore our common humanity.

You also mentioned that, "I am what I am, because of who we all are".

You noted the shortage of funding, in particular for the African continent, and voiced concern that the continued unpredictability and earmarking of much funding impacts on the provision of live-saving assistance and services to the displaced.

Under the inter-related themes of Promoting inclusion and empowering the people that UNHCR serves, you strongly welcomed UNHCR's engagement with development actors in order to realize the kind of comprehensive responses envisioned in the global compact on refugees. It was noted that developing countries continue to host 85 per cent of the world's refugee population. As one delegation said, "these countries are essentially providing a global public good and have the right to expect support from the international community". In this context, collaboration between UNHCR and the World Bank, in addition to other development actors, gives hope that more comprehensive responses can become the norm.

Many echoed the message of the keynote speaker, the Chief Executive Officer of the World Bank, Kristalina Georgieva, that addressing forced displacement is now an important part of the development agenda. As she said, we are witnessing a "seismic shift" in the way we approach humanitarian emergencies and that we have finally succeeded in bringing the two worlds — the humanitarian and development — together.

You encouraged States to consider measures to include and empower refugees from the outset of emergencies. This consists of their inclusion in national health and education systems, as well as initiatives aimed at fostering greater self-reliance, especially through access to labour markets, enabling them to also contribute to the communities in which they live. In this context, the important role of the private sector — not just as donors but as strategic partners — was underscored. Civil society was also highlighted as essential in supporting refugees and host communities.

You noted that the provision of cash assistance is a crucial element in ensuring empowerment for refugees and that they are able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Finding alternatives to camps offers further possibilities for self-reliance.

Together, all of these measures can also help prevent onward movements.

Under the theme of Pursuing solutions, you noted that addressing the root causes of forced displacement is an urgent priority for the international community. As one

delegation so simply put it: "peace and stability will lead to fewer conflicts, which will in turn lead to less movement of people".

You stressed that returns must be voluntary — a decision taken by the refugees themselves. In this context, the High Commissioner reminded us that UNHCR's efforts to support voluntary returns are not political in nature, but always based on humanitarian considerations. The reabsorption capacity of countries of origin must also be taken into account, and development assistance for countries of origin must be strengthened to ensure sustainable repatriation.

You highlighted the efforts made by countries, such as in West Africa, to locally integrate refugees in protracted refugee situations.

Resettlement was reaffirmed as a vital protection tool and expression of solidarity with refugee host countries. However, concerns were raised about the gap between resettlement needs and available spaces. States were encouraged to start resettlement programmes, or to expand existing programmes. Consideration could also be given to different types of admission, such as family reunification. A number of States announced increases in resettlement places, and I hope you will consider the call for more attention to vulnerable groups. It is important to keep in mind that, for many individuals, resettlement is the only viable solution to their plight.

Within the organization, you urged UNHCR to adapt to the "new ways of working" under the "grand bargain", the global compact on refugees and system-wide initiatives. The major reform initiatives underway within UNHCR, particularly the regionalization process announced by the High Commissioner, are seen as encouraging steps in this regard and, I think I can say — on behalf of this Committee — that you, Mr. High Commissioner, have our full support. There is no better time for UNHCR to be innovative, effective, efficient, agile and accountable.

With regard to the "grand bargain", I would like to stress the importance of non-earmarked and multi-year funding, which was highlighted by many delegations and which will place UNHCR in a stronger position to do everything we expect of the organization.

Finally, delegations commended UNHCR for its strong response and transparency in addressing and preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and welcomed the High Commissioner's commitment to a zero-tolerance policy in this regard. You also appreciated the emphasis placed on gender equality. UNHCR was asked to make sure sufficient resources are dedicated to the relevant structures within the organization to support these endeavours.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

With respect to the comprehensive refugee response framework, you applauded the 15 roll-out countries. As one delegation noted: "they are the vanguard and are setting the example for the rest of us to follow". Several countries applying the CRRF spoke of the concrete impact it is having in transforming the manner in which they respond to refugees, including through the regional approaches pursued in relation to the Somali refugee situation and in the Central America context. The application of the CRRF has been a catalyst for real change in this regard. You voiced concern for resource mobilization, particularly to operations in Africa, and noted that it is vital for those countries implementing the CRRF to be provided with the means to do so. At the same time, the efforts of many countries implementing comprehensive responses, despite not being formal roll-out countries, were also commended.

As noted by many of you, the global compact on refugees represents a powerful step forward for international cooperation and solidarity. Many of you commended UNHCR for the transparent and inclusive process through which the compact was

developed and highlighted the important contributions to the process from a wide range of stakeholders.

Looking ahead, you emphasized that it will be important for States to follow through with the robust implementation of the refugee compact and to honour your commitments as spelled out in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. When fully operational, the global refugee compact will be instrumental in making sure that the burden and responsibility for protecting and assisting refugees is shared in a truly equitable and predictable manner. Broadening the base of support from various stakeholders is an integral part of the global compact on refugees and you stressed the need for development resources to be truly additional to humanitarian funding. In 2019, the Global Refugee Forum will provide an important opportunity to make actual pledges, highlight key achievements and track progress against the objectives of the global compact on refugees.

As one delegation said: "Despite the suffering and challenges, 2018 has been a year of some optimism." I agree with the hope expressed that, in years to come, we can look back on our engagement this year as having important positive outcomes on behalf of those displaced. Your statements over the past few days have proven that protecting, assisting and finding solutions for refugees are truly global issues in need of global solutions.

"We are not indifferent" truly captured why we are here.

I urge all of us to come together and to translate our expressions of solidarity into concrete actions. This begins with a strong endorsement of the global compact for refugees in the General Assembly this fall — as many of you have called for. But let us not forget — that with the adoption of this compact, the real work starts. I would like to leave you with the words of this year's Nansen Refugee Award winner, Dr. Atar: who said, "We are here to save lives — not to sit".

Thank you.

18-17515 (E) 241018